
Information from the National Center for PTSD

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Help for Veterans with PTSD

Do I have PTSD?

A natural first question is whether your symptoms might be due to PTSD. You should know, though, that having symptoms does not always mean that you have PTSD. Some reactions to stress and trauma are normal. Since many common reactions look like the symptoms of PTSD, a doctor must decide if you have PTSD.

Also, stressors other than trauma may cause symptoms that are like those of PTSD. For example, work or money problems can lead to symptoms. Medical problems such as heart disease or diabetes, or mental health problems such as depression or anxiety, can have symptoms that look like PTSD. That is why you should see a provider who is trained to know which of your symptoms might be PTSD.

If I have other problems, can I also have PTSD?

Veterans with PTSD often have other types of problems. They might have other stress, medical or mental health problems. Sometimes PTSD is overlooked when other problems seem very pressing. If you have questions, ask your doctor if PTSD also needs to be treated.

Am I eligible for VA services?

All Veterans could possibly be eligible. Here is a brief list of factors that make up whether you are eligible:

- You completed active military service in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard (or Merchant Marines during WW II)
- You were discharged under other than dishonorable conditions

- You are a National Guard member or Reservist who has completed a federal deployment to a combat zone

You should also be aware that:

- Health care eligibility is not just for those who served in combat.
- Other groups may be eligible for some health benefits.
- Veteran's health care is not just for service-connected injuries or medical conditions.
- Signing up for health care is separate from signing up for other benefits at VA.
- Veteran's health care facilities are for both women and men. VA offers full-service health care to women Veterans.

For Veterans who served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, some benefits have been added. In January, 2008, the period of eligibility for free health care was extended from two to five years.

VA operates a yearly enrollment system that helps make sure that Veterans who are eligible can get care. For information, see [VA Health Care Eligibility & Enrollment](#). Your DD 214 is used to enroll for VA services. If you have trouble locating this form, VA Enrollment can still assist you.

What help is there for me (or my Veteran family member)?

PTSD is treatable. Many places within VA provide PTSD treatment. General programs that provide mental health services include VA medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs), and Vet Centers.

An extra note about Vet Centers: Offered through the Readjustment Counseling Service, [Vet Centers](#) are located in the community. They provide information, assessment, and counseling to any Veteran who served in a war zone. This includes conflicts such as in Somalia, Iraq, or Afghanistan. Vet Centers also offer services to families of Veterans for military-related issues. There are no fees or charges for Vet Center services, and services are confidential. That means no information will be given to any person or agency (including the VA) without your consent. Most of the staff are Veterans themselves. During normal business hours, you can call 1-800-905-4675 (Eastern) or 1-866-496-8838 (Pacific). The Vet Center program also has a 24/7 hotline, with all calls answered by combat Veterans: 1-877-927-8387 (WAR-VETS).

VA also has special PTSD clinics and programs that can help eligible Veterans..

When you see a VA provider, he or she will first assess whether or not you have PTSD. If you do have PTSD, remember that it can be treated. Several types of education and treatment are helpful to Veterans and their family members. These include:

- Classes on dealing with stress, anger, sleep, relationships, and PTSD symptoms
- One-to-one, group, and family counseling
- Medications

I think I am disabled due to PTSD caused by military service. What can I do?

Service-connected disability for PTSD is determined by the Compensation and Pension Service. C&P is an arm of [VA's Veterans Benefits Administration](#). This decision is not made by the providers who care for you in VA's PTSD clinics and Vet Centers. The process for making the decision involves several steps:

- A formal request (claim) must be filed using forms provided by the VA's Veterans Benefits Administration.
- After all the forms are submitted, you must complete interviews about your:
 - social history (a review of family, work, and education before, during, and after military service)
 - psychiatric status (a review of past and current mental health symptoms and of traumas gone through while in the military).

The forms and information about the application process can be obtained from Benefits Officers at any VA medical center, outpatient clinic, or regional office.

The process of applying for a VA disability for PTSD can take several months. It can be confusing and quite stressful. [Veterans Service Organizations](#) (VSOs) can help Veterans and family members with VA disability claims. VSOs provide Service Officers at no cost. Service Officers know all about every step in the application and interview process. They can provide practical help and moral support. Some Service Officers are experts in helping Veterans with PTSD disability claims.

Even if you have not been a member of a given VSO, you still can ask for help from a Service Officer of that VSO. To find a Service Officer to represent you, just contact the local office of any VSO. You may also wish to ask other Veterans who have applied for VA disability what they would suggest. A mental health provider at a VA PTSD clinic or a Vet Center may also have some tips.

My claim for a VA PTSD disability has been turned down by the Benefits Office, but I believe I have PTSD due to military service. What can I do?

A Veterans Service Officer can explain how to file an appeal. The Service Officer may be able to help you gather the information you need to make a successful appeal. You may want to contact a Service Officer who is an expert in helping Veterans who have PTSD-related claims.

I can't get records from the military that I need for my disability claim. What can I do?

Veterans Service Officers can help you file the paperwork needed to get your military records. If your Service Officer is not able to help you get needed records, ask him or her to direct you to another Service Officer who has more experience in getting records.

The Center for Integrated Healthcare gratefully acknowledges the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders for authorship of information contained within this brochure.

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For more information call the PTSD Information Line at (802) 296-6300 or send email to ncptsd@ncptsd.org.